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THE ANOMALOUS POSITION OF THE UNMARRIED WOMAN.

BY CAROLYN SHIPMAN.

IN Mr. Henry James' novel "The Golden Bowl," the Prince says to Charlotte Stant:

"'I've been thinking it all the while so probable, you know, that you would have seen your way to marrying—some good, kind, clever, rich American.'

"'I tried every one I came across,' was her reply. 'No one would have me. . . . Existence, you know, all the same, doesn't depend on that. I mean,' she smiled, 'on having caught a husband.'

"'Oh—existence!' the Prince vaguely commented.

"'You think I ought to argue for more than mere existence?' she asked. 'I don't see why *my* existence—even reduced as much as you like to being merely mine—should be so impossible. There are things, of sorts, I should be able to have—things I should be able to be. The position of a single woman to-day is very favorable, you know.'

"'Favorable to what?'

"'Why, just *to* existence—which may contain, after all, in one way and another, so much. It may contain, at the worst, even affections; affections, in fact, quite particularly; fixed, that is, on one's friends. . . .'

"To which the Prince replied, in summing the matter up: 'My dear friend, it's always a question of doing the best for one's self one can—without injury to others. . . . I venture, therefore, to repeat my hope that you'll marry some capital fellow; and also to repeat my belief that such a marriage will be more favorable to you, as you call it, than even the spirit of the age.'"

Such, in general and in brief, is the attitude of the world towards the unmarried woman. From her point of view, existence does not necessarily depend upon marriage; from the world's, and that of her friends, it should so depend, in order that she may "do the best for herself," or "fulfil her destiny," or "have some one to protect her," as the case may be. She is reasoned with, urged, and even ominously warned of the time, fast ap-

proaching, when her charms will fade, and she will be passed by of men for lineaments more youthful and attractions less mature. She is told that it were better to marry without the romantic love hoped for when she was younger, than not to marry at all; better to wed "solid respectability and sterling worth," and so acquire an acknowledged position in the social fabric, than to eat her heart out in waiting for an ideal.

Not only is she reasoned with and cajoled, but she is also tricked into meeting possible *partis*. She is put on the defensive by comments (as a rule made by married women) skilfully conveyed by these same solicitous friends: "Why, do you suppose, such an attractive woman has never married? She would make an admirable wife." And she wisely curbs her desire to reply in a manner not altogether complimentary to the husbands of the speculative ladies.

There is no doubt that the widened sphere of opportunity for American women furnishes the single woman with a position "very favorable to existence," as Charlotte Stant put it. She has freedom to work, no responsibility of household duties and children, her own money if she earns her living, the delights of travel—in short, she can live her own life to the limit of ambition, and develop all of her latent powers. A pleasant picture, surely, and one to tempt aspiring womanhood. The charm of a latch-key and the independence it implies, the comfort of one's club or a cozy apartment, the pleasure of mingling with men and women on a plane of business equality, and the accompanying contact with the world which is denied to the "protected woman," are considerations not to be lightly dismissed. Such experiences inoculate the blood, and the fever appears again at intervals even after that life has been left behind.

Such is the "spirit of the age," as the Prince expressed it. What is the reverse side of the medal?

Let us leave out of consideration the unemployed single women occupied only with "affections quite particularly fixed on their friends," or waiting for marriage as most idle unmarried women secretly are, and speak only of the employed. Perhaps the greatest number of employed single women are engaged in teaching; therefore a teacher's life may be regarded as typical.

In a small town a teacher has little pay, with corresponding low cost of living, hard work, very little leisure, no theatres or

concerts worth considering if she knows the best, few temptations to spend money, but a position as a social being (not a teacher) if education is held in repute in the town. This advantage depends for its value on the personnel of the society. If the "high school" or "academy" is regarded as a centre, the town is likely to contain some people worth knowing; otherwise the woman is thrown on her own resources and is regarded merely as "a teacher"—*i.e.*, a machine for pumping knowledge into children.

A teacher in a public school of a large city has practically no social position *per se*. Whatever life she has outside of her work is created by her own efforts, and for these she has little leisure. A private-school teacher in a large city may be well paid, but she works hard, has little time to herself because of outside duties; and, if she has no social connection with the city through friends, when she is invited out, it is as "Julia's teacher," to discuss with Julia's parents over the dinner-table Julia's progress in history or what not. Other social occasions (aside from her intercourse with fellow teachers and pupils) are school receptions, when Julia's parents are present to ask her how she likes teaching.

A college teacher's fate is more enviable; but here again the work is very hard, and the great disadvantage is the constant feminine atmosphere, only relieved to a slight degree by the masculine presence, and that, possibly, not of one's choosing. Presidents, deans, and women of similar educational positions have more power and influence, in proportion as they are fewer in number, and consequent increase of social attachment.

On the whole, however, the average teacher's life is one of social detachment, hard, nerve-exhausting, and little appreciated by those to whom her services are given—and, moreover, poorly, often wretchedly, paid.

Perhaps the most enviable career for a single woman is the life of a successful writer, editor, or productive (not studying) artist—*e.g.*, singer or painter, in a city. Such a woman has the advantage of congenial work and friends, a large enough bank account for a home and travel, for theatre and concerts. During the most marriageable age—from twenty-five to thirty years—the zest for work and advancement is so great that other thoughts are likely to be crowded out. The joy of living is apparently at its height.

But, after the thirtieth year is passed, when ambition has been to a large extent gratified, and the appetite for freedom is sated; when her position is secure, and her work routine; when her women friends marry one by one and she is left alone, there comes a time when she grows introspective. "What is the aim of it all? For what and for whom am I living?" she asks herself. Then, no matter how many friends she has, a great loneliness settles down upon her—sometimes so oppressive as almost to cause physical heartache—and she feels her detachment from the general scheme of things.

Particularly is this true on holidays and summer Sundays, if she is forced to be in town. Her married friends have their Christmas plans involving families. She may be—she probably is—invited to join them, but she is an outsider. If she has a woman friend similarly placed, they perhaps dine together and go to the play on Christmas, but she realizes that they are two lonely women trying to keep up a brave front. "Holidays are soon over," you may reason. Yes, but they return, and there is always an undercurrent of that haunting loneliness ready to spring up unexpectedly in a woman's heart. Nothing is more painful or hard to bear for a sensitive woman than the kind of loneliness that may overtake her at any turn if she is living a detached life. Married women with family cares or "protected" women with too much leisure often envy the independent life of the self-supporting woman. But they see only the pleasant side. There is another; and the envied one would, more often than most people know, exchange lots with the envier. After a woman has passed her thirtieth year, she is very likely to tire of independence and to wish for guidance and advice. The argument that she is "as free as a man" has been satisfactorily proved to be sophistry. She learns that she is half man and half woman, deprived of the advantages of a wife, with the burdens of a man, but not his privileges. For example, if she is restless and lonely at night, she cannot go to the play in solitary fashion, like a man; she might do so in Boston, but she could not in New York and feel quite comfortable, if she were young. She must sit at home and try to divert her mind if no companionship is available. She has not even man's solace of a cigar and a stroll. Propriety forbids solitary walks for ladies after dark!

This matter of independence for a woman who has always known

it is a vital one in marriage, and not to be trippingly disposed of. It looms large when all the connotations of the word are considered: independence in conduct, thought, time and money. Probably only women unhappily married would wish as fervently as Diana of the Crossways for "freedom to breathe, gaze, climb, grow with the grasses, fly with the clouds, to muse, to sing, to be an unclaimed self." Not every woman has her jealous, exacting husband. But even so, the wish to be "an unclaimed self" unconsciously asserts itself at times; the occasional tendency to eat our cake and try to keep it is manifest in us all. Independence is the single woman's greatest boon, and that very possession helps to detach her from the social fabric.

The implied ingenuousness of the unmarried woman may become a source of irritation. The world assumes much the same attitude towards her that some mothers take towards their five-year-old children: they adjudge them too inexperienced to have observed life, forgetting their own early years, when deep impressions gave instinctive knowledge. Because a woman is unmarried, the world treats her like a veritable *ingénue*; no matter how much experience and observation of life she has had, her intuition and imagination and reason count for nothing against the claims of a chit of twenty summers just fresh from her marriage vows, who can "chaperon" her, forsooth! This state of things would be annoying were it not so laughable! It becomes a real disadvantage when used as an argument to prevent a woman from living alone. What age must an unmarried woman have reached before Society will allow her to chaperon herself?

Anthony Trollope's view of women expressed on the occasion of Eleanor Bold's marriage to Mr. Arabin, that they are clinging vines which creep along the earth until they find a tower up which to climb, is an obsolete metaphor. Especially is this supineness untrue in the twentieth century. Women are not only free, but able to stand alone. The strongest, most intellectual woman, however, needs companionship and the love of one particular individual. The classic example is George Eliot, whose "mind of a man" was housed in a woman's body pathetically dependent upon protection and love. This fact satisfactorily explains the reason for her marriage to Mr. Cross. If she had been less feminine, her last days would have been spent in mourning her lost companion.

Miss Repplier, in her admirable defence of the Spinster, asks:

"What if she is not in the least wistful, and never casts longing looks at her sister-in-law's babies, nor strains them passionately to her heart, nor deems it a privilege to nurse her nephews through whooping-cough and measles, nor offers herself in any fashion as a holocaust upon other people's domestic altars? What if, holding her life in her two hands, and knowing it to be her only real possession, she disposes of it in the way she feels will give her most content, swimming smoothly in the stream of her own nature, and clearly aware that happiness lies in the development of her individual tastes and acquirements? . . . Marriage is a delightful thing; but it is not, and never can be, a duty."

True! But the woman who does not at some time of her life think of marriage as a possibility or a desideratum is either too masculine for such a desire (*i.e.*, abnormal), too confirmed a spinster in her fastidiousness or habits of single life, or is in the enjoyment of a career artistic, literary or otherwise professional which is sufficiently productive of satisfaction to compensate for the lack of married companionship. Probably, if the truth were confessed, the majority of unmarried women over thirty years of age have the normal desire to be married. A genius, like Rosa Bonheur, may live a life apart in an altitude of creation and contemplation, where human companionship is unnecessary except at intervals; but it is the exceptional woman who does not secretly cherish the hope or expectation of marriage. Even the most unlikely entertains the idea.

The maternal instinct is the motive power for marriage with most women, and many unmarried women even long for children without the necessity of a husband! The world is inclined to think a wife's existence unjustified if she has no progeny, like the old man who looked at Mrs. Carlyle in astonishment upon her confession that she was childless, and exclaimed, "What have you been doing all these years?"

The desire of the average educated woman who marries in these days is for companionship. Miss Repplier lays too much stress upon maternity, which is only incidental in such a marriage. There are interests, emotions, obligations, and ambitions unconnected with the rearing of children, as she protests. But matrimony does not necessarily imply the rearing of children, despite the misleading and officious pronouncement of the author of the phrase "race suicide." By whose dictum does a woman "owe it

to the race" to have children if she does not desire them? She did not ask to be brought into the world, neither did her arrival imply a contract to bear children as likely to be unthankful as thankful for "the boon of life." If the law of the survival of the fittest is not to become utterly extinct, the supply of unwelcome children should be lessened, for the antagonism of the parents will surely crop out in the progeny in some mental or moral twist.

There is a well-worn truism suggesting sour grapes: Riches do not bring happiness. The irritated reply to such pseudo-philosophy might be: No, but they help to soften sorrow and relieve unhappiness as poverty does not. Better to be unhappy and rich than unhappy and poor.

So with marriage. To the average person, life is a gamble at best, and marriage a lottery; but the calculation of chances favors greater happiness to the married than to the unmarried woman, because of the possibility of completer, fuller life. Hume left money to be spent on masses for his soul, agnostic that he was, on the chance that the Catholic religion might prove to be the true one. In the same manner a woman past forty years of age who has never been in love, might better take the chances with a man whom she can respect and who is her equal in refinement and social position, and is congenial to her, than never to marry at all. It is safe to say that no woman meets her "ideal." He is a creature of moonbeams and sawdust constructed by youthful fancy. But she should look for certain traits in a man—courage, honor, sincerity, generosity, tenderness, sympathy—above all, loyalty, which are good to live with day after day and day after day, "for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health"—qualities which endure and command respect and form the only true foundation for lasting love, when the passion of youth and early love is spent.

I might quote Tennyson's "Princess," but I will not! Neither will I mention Woman's Sphere. My brief is for companionship, for married *camaraderie*. The plea is not sentimental; it is social, practical, even precautionary, like taking out an insurance policy against certain death! Women are bound to have unhappiness in whatever their sphere. Why not have some one to share it, a congenial travelling companion with whom to work and play, to be sad or gay? "To hold back the hand from the rose

because of the thorn" is to miss the exhilaration of an adventure which is just as likely to be successful as the opposite. The woman who hesitates is left behind.

But, some one argues, suppose the women willing to marry. Where are the men? In one small Eastern town of which I know, of the twenty-five hundred souls, sixty are women far past the marriageable age, and there are numbers of marriageable girls. In New England the proportion of single women is even more discouraging. Whom shall they marry? The number of eligible men decreases as women advance in age—no woman of forty wants a crusty old bachelor of fifty, and the men most attractive to women are already married.

The average man will not ask a woman in marriage unless he can support her in the manner to which she is accustomed. With the increasing cost of living, the problem grows in seriousness. The material side of marriage is so emphasized that the question now asked when a woman marries is not, "What is her husband's character? Is he honorable, courageous, generous, loyal, worthy to be the father of children?" The question is, How much money is he worth? Yet there exist fine women who would "scrub the floor for him" if they could find the right man, as I recently heard a woman say who lives in independent ease. Doubtless there are many Dianas of the Crossways whose Thomas Redworths would not need to let the world go wrong for fear of lack of money. But the Redworth type of man has fixed ideas of what is due to a woman and he is difficult to convince.

Where lies the trouble? Perhaps in education and the present over-emphasis of money. Any system of education for women is defective which ignores wifehood and motherhood—nay, which does not tacitly have these ends in view. Not that women are incapable of other things, but that in the long run they will presumptively find their truest, completest happiness in the married state. I contend that the woman who is not a vital part of the social organism and the centre of a home revolving around her, occupies an anomalous position. She is part of a world, social or economic, a world of theories and abstract principles, but not of *the* world of life-giving forces, the world of actual creation of which the family (the foundation of the state) is the unit. She is like the fringe of a shawl, which is not the texture; belonging to it as an accompaniment, but not necessary.

But some one must teach," we hear. "Some one must perform the duties now accomplished by wage-earning women. Who would be left to work if all women became wives and mothers?"

Who did the work before women entered the field in such numbers? Was there not then as much sound and profitable education as now? Why this sudden necessity for women to earn money when heretofore the fathers and brothers and husbands supported them? How much happier are the restless women of the present day than their grandmothers and great-grandmothers who did not compete with men along industrial lines? How much finer, more unselfish and more lovable men and women are we producing as the result of this social and economic restlessness? It is well for every woman to be able to earn her own living, but do we not carry it too far?

The question is merely of the greatest final happiness and good. No one will deny that we all desire happiness. What will be the ultimate end if the education of women tends to make them unmarried wage-earners, and if money is to be the chief requisite for marriage? A society of spinsters and clubmen, and the "race-suicide" theory disproved (as it now is) by the very class of people least fitted to perpetuate their species, the ignorant and vicious, and with such zeal as to furnish occupation for all time to innumerable and increasing "social settlements"!

CAROLYN SHIPMAN.